



National Park Service
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Point Reyes National
Seashore

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Point Reyes National Seashore Fire Management



Crew completes facecut and prepares for the backcut



Trees are piled for later chipping

Safety Award Recognizes Fire and Fuels Crews for Successful Tree Removal Operations

Fourteen crew members from Point Reyes National Seashore and Golden Gate National Recreation Area were presented with the 2005 Annual Safety Award at Point Reyes National Seashore, for meeting the technical challenges of removing over 6,000 eucalyptus trees during a complex, multi-phase fuelbreak project. Significant work was completed on the Highway One Fuelbreak, in an area known as 13 Curves, between December 2004 and November 2005. Diligent observation of safety practices was demonstrated, while felling trees, skidding logs, stacking limbs, and chipping both large and small diameter trees, resulting in zero time loss to injury.

The Safety Award Nomination noted that tree cutting is among the ten most dangerous jobs in the U.S. In some years, it has a higher fatality rate than any other occupation. These workers are at a high risk of being killed by large falling trees or branches. Firefighters routinely use tree cutting techniques to construct fireline during a wildfire, or to create fuelbreaks for managing future wildfires.

Removing eucalyptus trees involves some extra challenges. "Eucalyptus is a new environment for us. It's not a typical fuel type in western forests," said Jordan Reeser, the Highway One

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project manager. "We're used to working in mixed conifer or oak woodlands. The height and density of eucalyptus, along with interlocking tree crowns, makes it hard to determine the weight distribution, or how the trees would naturally fall."

Situational awareness was repeatedly emphasized at daily tailgate safety briefings during the Highway One project. "We follow strict tree felling guidelines at all times. Proper facecuts and backcuts, lifting with the knees, assessing the solidity of trees, knowing safety routes, yelling "backcut", and making sure no one is within a tree's falling distance are some of the critical measures taken," Reeser added. Another job hazard associated with eucalyptus removal is the field of stumps left after cutting which require follow- up treatment before they are finally "flush- cut" to the ground. Eucalyptus is prone to massive resprouting unless the stumps are chemically treated or physically removed.

Training is also critical for safe tree cutting operations. All fire and fuels management crew members are required to take a 28 hour Wildland Fire Chainsaws class to learn how to properly operate and maintain chainsaws. After completing this course, participants are certified to cut trees up to 12 inches in diameter. At Point Reyes, crew members retake this class as a refresher every year. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group, which establishes interagency qualification standards, requires additional training in order to cut medium and large sized trees. Three of the crew members who received the Point Reyes National Seashore Safety Award hold the highest level of tree falling qualifications.

The Highway One fuelbreak project has also created training opportunities. Marin County Fire Department and the National Park Service have used the project site for field exercises during the Wildland Fire Chainsaws class. The experience gained with these non- native trees is being shared with other sites where eucalyptus is a problem, such as Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Even for experienced sawyers, the new challenges of eucalyptus create a constant learning environment. "We'll be ready for fire assignments in Australia," Reeser laughed.

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